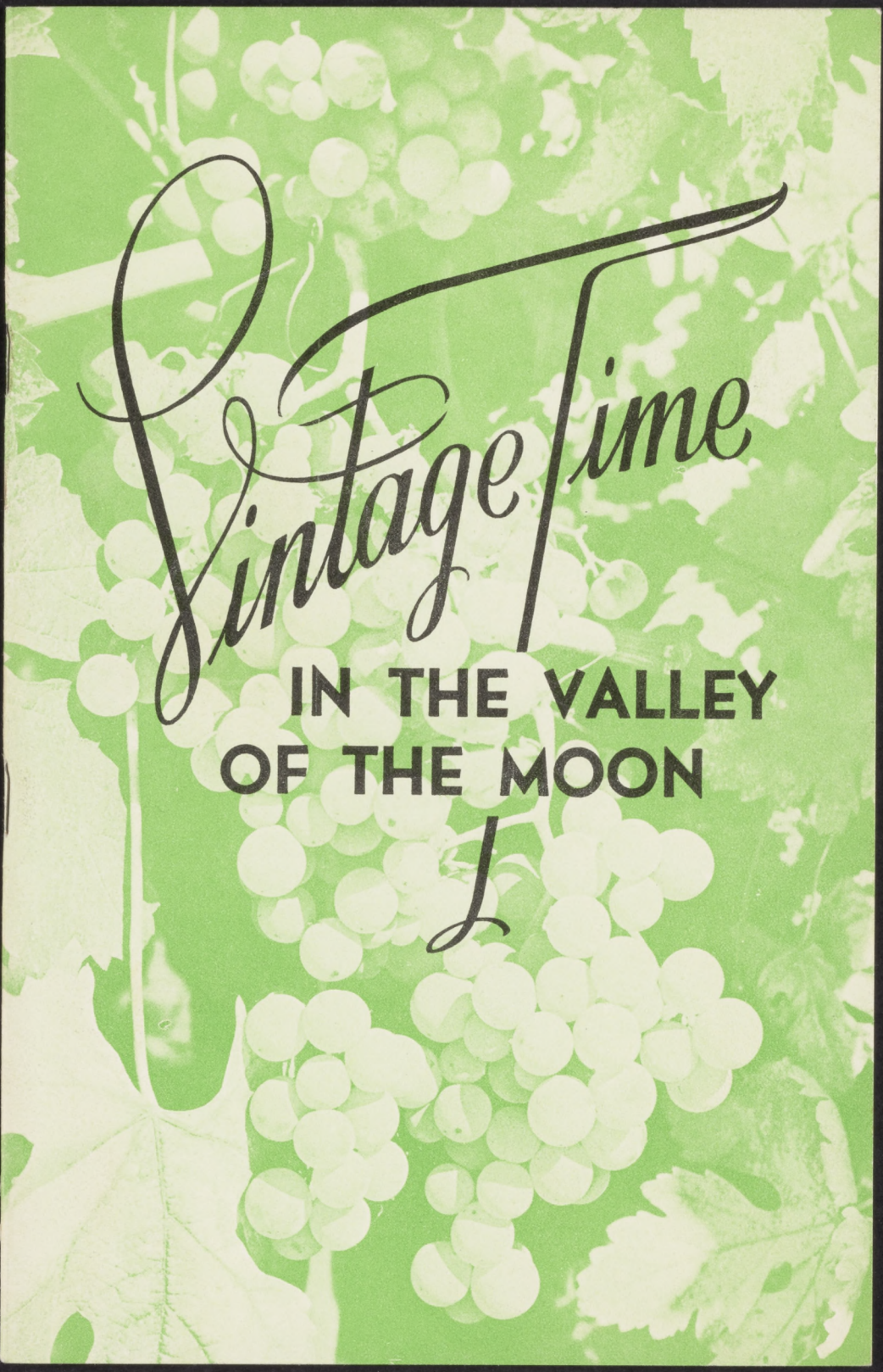

Vintage Time
IN THE VALLEY
OF THE MOON

Vintage Time

in the

Valley of the Moon

By

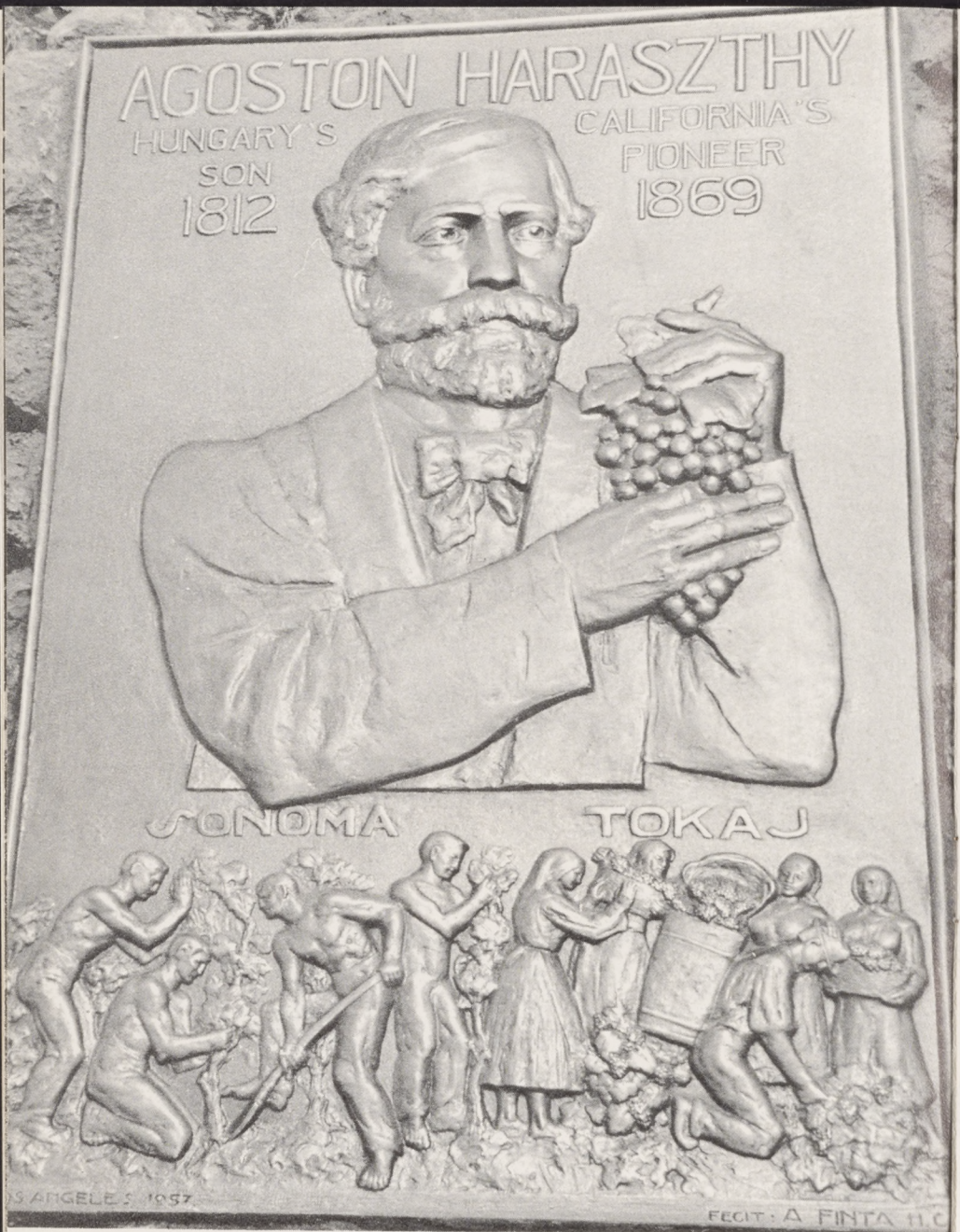
BRIAN MCGINTY

This booklet is for free distribution to all who are interested in the vineyards of the Sonoma Valley.



WHEN the warm glow of Indian summer descends on the hills and valleys that roll back from the edge of the Pacific, and occasional breezes, heralds of approaching autumn, stir grass in the fields beside winding country roads, California's wine-country strongly beckons to weary city dwellers in search of an afternoon's rest and relaxation. They take to their automobiles, and, responding to the lure of the open fields and grassy hillsides, lose themselves in the tawny folds of the Coast Range. Be it on the sun-caressed slopes of Cucamonga Peak, or where the woods of Los Gatos descend to the edge of the broad Santa Clara Valley, the fugitives from the clamor of the cities, without fail, find peaceful havens of rest and refreshment. North of San Francisco, where the river-veined Napa Valley stretches to the foothills of towering Mount St. Helena, and, farther west, where the oak-embowered slopes of the rolling Mayacamas tumble to the floor of the long Sonoma Valley, they find themselves drawn to the open doors of wayside wineries, and, in the cool depths of the old stone cellars, gather at the spigots of oaken casks to cool their throats with the refreshing fruits of the vine.

As the month of September draws to a close, and swarthy laborers return from the vineyards, their wagons piled high with a harvest of succulent grapes, an impressive number of these weary wanderers find their way over meandering roads, through grassy cattle country and towering forests of blue gums, to the peaceful Sonoma Valley. North of the Golden Gate a scant forty miles, this gentle depression in the rolling Coast Range mountains is in many ways a world unto itself. The Indians who tramped the banks of the Sonoma Creek in the centuries before the white men came called it the Valley of the Moon. And the name, which persists today, is not undescriptive. The nocturnal planet, in its travels across the evening sky, seems to favor the valley with an undue abundance of its midnight silver, lingering long



The imposing bronze plaque pictured above adorns a large native stone at the entrance to the historic winery at Buena Vista Vineyards honoring Agoston Haraszthy as the father of California viticulture.

above its rich red earth, departing only with an air of reluctance, to perform its errands on other sides of the globe. Jack London, whose novel *Valley of the Moon* extolled the rolling foothills to the north of the old Spanish village of Sonoma, thought it an appropriate cognomen, and those who, today, visit the valley at vintage time are more likely than not to agree with him.

More than any of the picturesque vineyard villages which nestle in the valleys and cling to mountain slopes the length of the Golden State, the peaceful town of Sonoma can properly be called the cradle of the state's wine industry. Here, in the stream-watered gardens of Mission San Francisco Solano, the Franciscan Father Jose Altimira planted a large vineyard of blue-black Mission grapes, imported from Spain, in 1824. And here, too, the Spanish grandee, General Mariano Vallejo, experimented with the padres' vines and with cuttings of his own, sent by ship from New York, and succeeded in producing modest vintages of dark ruby wine.

But the flowering of Sonoma and the Valley of the Moon as the leading vine center of the state did not come until the late 1850's, when the Hungarian nobleman, Agoston Haraszthy, came north from San Francisco.

A tall man, with flowing black beard and eyes that burned fire, Haraszthy brought to the sleepy Valley of the Moon a strange enthusiasm and excitement. Exiled from his native Hungary in 1840 for his zealous devotion to democratic ideals, he had renounced the title of Count, by which he had been known in the Valley of the Danube, and moved to the heart of the great American frontier. There, on the banks of the winding Wisconsin River, he built lumber mills, planted hops and a few grapes, and founded a town. In his spare moments, he also wrote a two-volume account of his impressions of life in America, which was published in 1844 as *Utazas Eisakamerikaban* (Journeys in North America). Haraszthy's

fellow Wisconsin pioneers, who called him Colonel in recognition of his service in the Austrian guard of Emperor Ferdinand, were amazed at his endless store of energy and enthusiasm, and when they contemplated an undertaking that required for its success the support of a bold promoter, they turned without fail to the Hungarian. The year 1849 found Colonel Haraszthy captain of a dusty train of prairie schooners, wending its way from Independence, Missouri, along the Santa Fe trail to San Diego, California. Sheriff of the County of San Diego in 1850, member of the State Assembly a year later, he soon moved on to the frontier metropolis of San Francisco, where, by appointment of President Pierce, he became Assayer of the new United States Mint.

But, for all his varied activities, Haraszthy's consuming passion, through the whole of his life, was for growing things, and in this, as the residents of the Valley of the Moon soon learned, he had a genius.

On 560 acres in the low foothills above the valley, the Colonel set out his first vines in the spring of 1857. There were Rieslings, Pinots, Tokays, and Zinfandels — cuttings he had brought to California from Europe a few years before. Long tunnels were dug deep in the limestone hills, and massive stone cellars, the first of their kind in California, were built above them. His preparations were elaborate, but the faith he had placed in the Sonoma soil and climate did not disappoint him.

In 1860, 70,000 vines were set out on the hillsides of Haraszthy's Buena Vista Vineyards, and, in 1861, 135,000. His wines were entered in competitions at the State Fair in Sacramento, and swept the top awards. Impressed by the Colonel's successes, Governor John Downey sent him on a tour of western Europe in 1861, where the indefatigable Hungarian collected 300,000 cuttings of the finest European vines, distributing them throughout the state on his return, and



An old stone winery at Buena Vista Vineyards.

Winery entrance, Haraszthy crest over doorway.





Interior of another stone winery showing entrance to tunnel dug into solid rock of hillside, and a portion of wine storage tunnel.



writing his classic treatise, *Grape-Culture, Wines, and Wine-Making,* which Harpers published in 1862. Within the space of less than five years, Haraszthy had transformed the languid Valley of the Moon into a bustling center of agriculture and commerce, and already earned the title by which later generations of California vintners would remember him, "Father of California Viticulture."

There were many who followed in the Colonel's footsteps. His son, Attila, who had taken a daughter of General Vallejo as his wife, in time assumed direction of the vineyards at Buena Vista, toiling long hours on the wind-swept hillsides, becoming, as some said, a half-brother to the vine. A second son, Arpad, married another of the General's daughters and moved on to the frontier metropolis of San Francisco, where he earned renown as creator of the famous effervescence, *Eclipse* champagne. And Haraszthy's daughter, Ida, carried her father's proud pioneer traditions to the sun-drenched fields of Los Angeles where, as wife of the Forty-Niner Major Henry Hancock, she became mistress of the historic Rancho La Brea, world-famed repository of Pleistocene fossils.

Haraszthy's successes in the vineyards of the Valley of the Moon inspired the similar ventures of countless others. Charles Kohler, William Hood, Colonel A. J. Butler, General Charles Williams, Christian Weise, and Colonel George Hooper found the dry, red earth of the Sonoma Valley as much to their liking as it was to that of their Hungarian predecessor. Jacob Gundlach and his friend, Emil Dresel, scion of an old and honored German wine-making family, set out the first vines of their famous Rhine Farm in 1858. The youthful Charles Krug acquired a vineyard from Colonel Haraszthy and made Sonoma wine for a time during the early 1860's, before withdrawing over the wooded Mayacamas to the Napa Valley, where he attained international recognition as a master vintner. Major Jacob Snyder's El Cerrito Vineyard was begun in 1859 on land purchased from



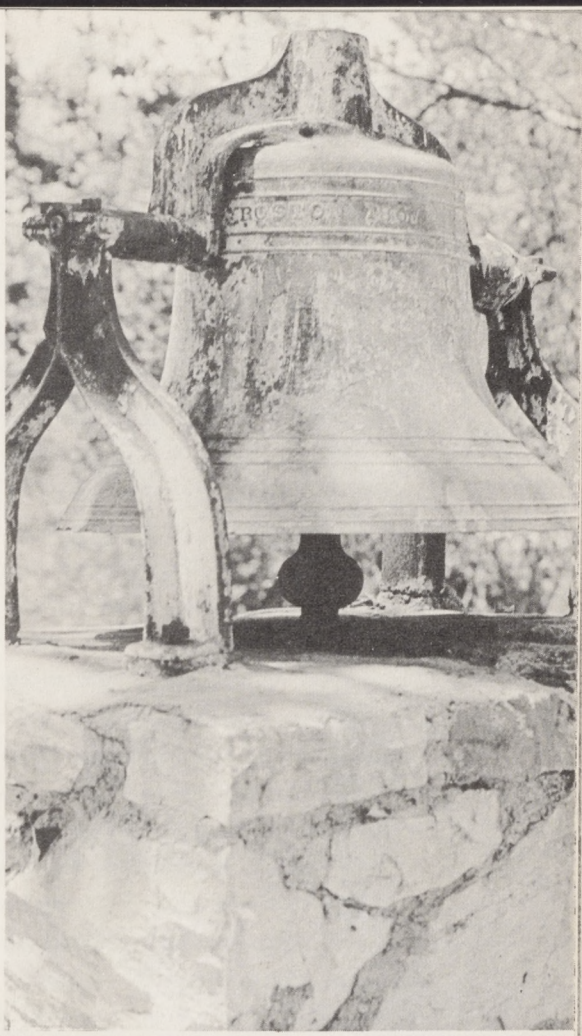


Fr. Alfred Boeddecker, O.F.M., of San Francisco, performs impressive ceremony of the Blessing of the Grapes before historic old Sonoma Mission.

Descendants of first vintners, at left below, participate in colorful pageant depicting the saga of Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma.

Sonorous old bell installed at Buena Vista ranch by Col. Haraszthy about 1857 still rings out welcome to visitors on special occasions.

Festival folk dancing is always an attraction at Vintage Time as illustrated by the poised and pretty group at right below in their Bottle Dance.





Haraszthy, and within four years its proud owner boasted of 21,000 vines and annual pressings of 5,000 gallons each. In 1870, the Italian Guiseppi Massoni arrived in Sonoma and began to produce wines on a small scale with Martin Scatena, later founder of the Roma Wine Co., and the Virginian, Colonel George F. Hooper, former president of San Francisco's First National Gold Bank, began to grow choice Sonoma wines in 1876. When Haraszthy left for Central America in 1868, there, enshrouded in mystery, to meet a steaming jungle death in the mouths of hungry alligators, these friends and students carried on his work. Vineyards spread from the borders of the town of Sonoma in all directions, across the low foothills, in long rows on the flat fields that bordered the Sonoma Creek. And there were wineries, hidden, Old World fashion, in bowers of vines and towering trees that protected the stone cellars and the liquid treasures stored within them from the burning fingers of the California sun. Paralleling progress that was made in other wine-districts of the state, production regularly increased in the vineyards of the Valley of the Moon, and vintages, exported to the eastern United States, or on occasions shipped to the most discerning connoisseurs of Europe, were received with hearty and sincere commendation.

Then the tragedy struck.

The phylloxera, a minute aphis-like insect, had first been observed in a greenhouse near London, where vines from the eastern United States had been received for grafting. On the Atlantic side of the Rockies, the pest caused only the mildest damage. But when it found its way onto thin-skinned French and California vines in the early 1880's, it became a deadly marauder. Frantic vineyardists flooded their vines with water, separated their plantings by vast stretches of open land, then imported ants that ate the insects by the thousands. But none of their efforts seemed to bring relief. With eggs deposited in the upper parts of the root, the insects hatched and rose in a gauzy

Vineyard vistas are extensive in the Sonoma-Napa region.





California's vineyards produce grapes for about 90 per cent of America's fine wines. This close-up illustrates the vigor of grapevines in the Sonoma County vineyards where rolling, wooded hills frame hundreds of acres of plantings in fertile soil especially adapted to modern viticulture.

swarm of a million winged plunderers. From one vineyard they flew to a high altitude, spotted another field of succulent vines, and swooped down on it in a mood for deadly destruction. It was not until someone hit on the idea of grafting the delicate vines Colonel Haraszthy had imported onto thick-skinned root stocks from the Atlantic seaboard that the pestilence was finally subdued. The graftings resulted in an increased hardiness that withstood the onslaughts of the phylloxera and eventually helped to stamp it out.

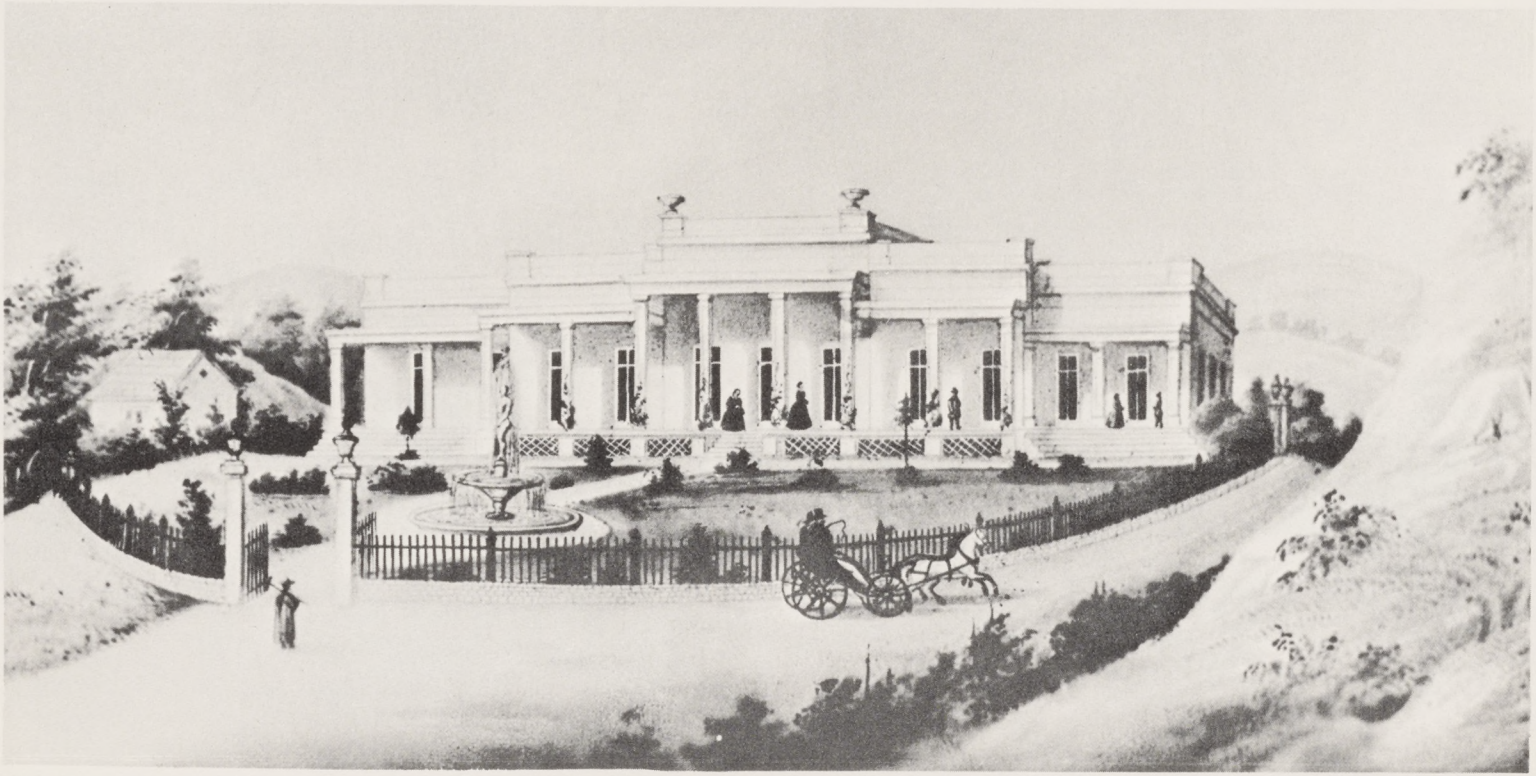
The spirits of the men who laid the foundations of California's wine industry almost a century ago live on in the vineyards which flourish in the Valley of the Moon today. The vaults of Samuele Sebastiani and the Castler Cellars of Paul Rossigneux welcome visitors daily to the cool depths of their old stone buildings, where wines are dutifully crushed and slowly fermented in the finest traditions of the ancient art. And the doors of wineries in nearby Kenwood and Glen Ellen are, likewise, opened wide. The townspeople of Sonoma, each year welcoming thousands of visitors to the wooded plaza in the center of their town, celebrate the annual harvest of grapes with the colorful Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival. Franciscan Father Alfred Boeddecker, founder of San Francisco's proud St. Anthony's Dining Room, known to the people of the city as the "Miracle of Jones Street"-or another sandalled member of his order-comes north in the final week of each September, to stand before the walls of the old Sonoma Mission and perform the impressive ceremony of the Blessing of the Grapes. "We thank Thee for the richness of our soil in this Valley of the Moon," the brown-robed padre says, ". . . and for the grape clusters telling us of Thy bounty." A pageant depicting the valley's proud history unfolds before the Mission. And there is dancing in the plaza, and the strains of music float high into the autumn sky.

The Buena Vista Vineyards, still producing wines bearing the proud Haraszthy crest, stand in the wooded hills above the plaza, their

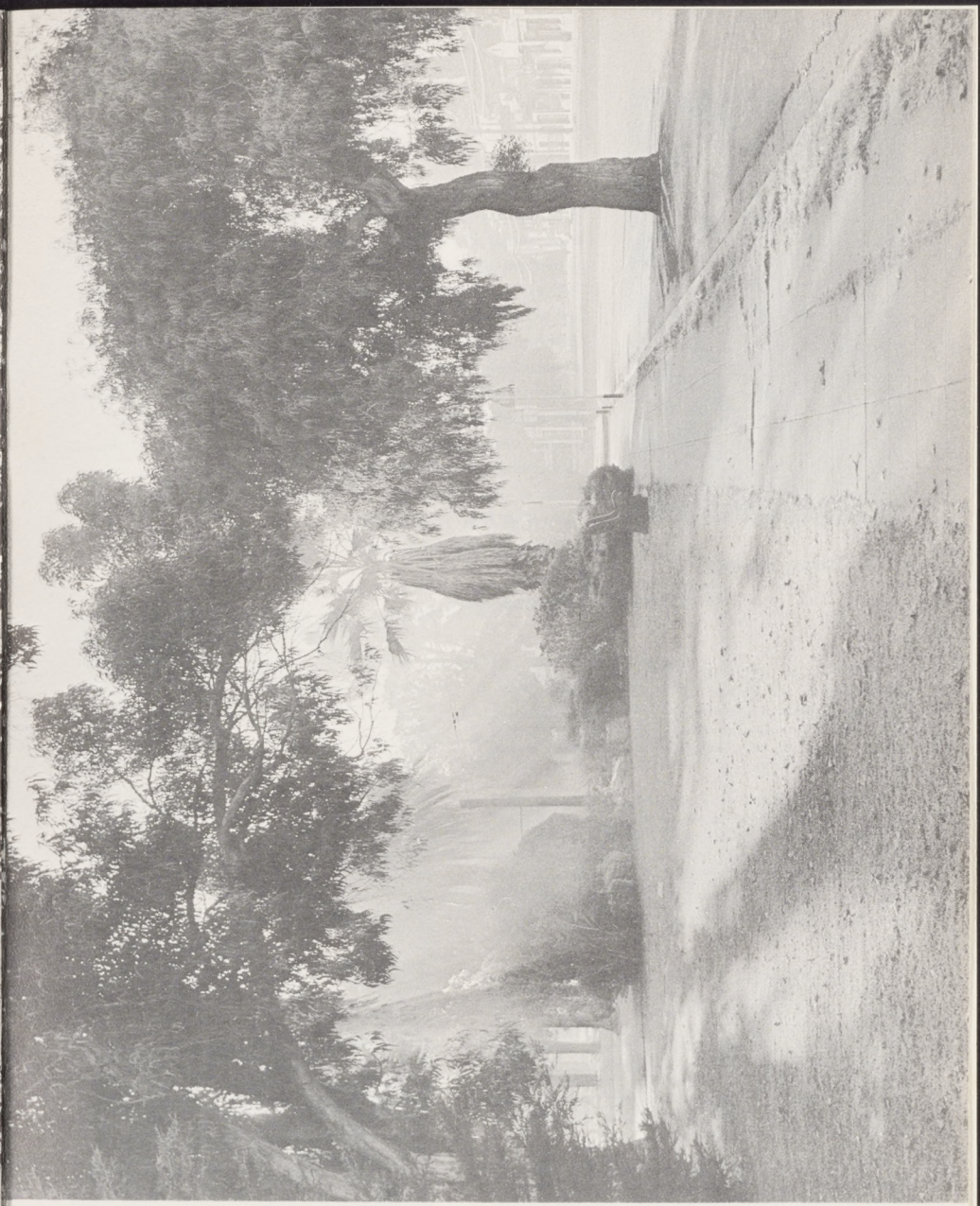
gates flung wide. Vintage Festival visitors, almost without fail, find their way over a narrow, tree-choked road to the old Haraszthy cellars, nestled in the mountains at the edge of a tumbling, tree-shaded brook. Though badly damaged in the earthquake of 1906, the old buildings have been faithfully restored and designated a State Historical Landmark. There, at the behest of their genial host, Frank Bartholomew, President of United Press International, who now owns the cellars and vineyards, they lift to their lips glasses of Pinot, Semillon, or the favorite of Colonel Haraszthy, the aromatic, red Zinfandel.

And weekend wanderers, returning at the close of the Festival to their homes in California's sprawling cities, plunge headlong into the many duties of their metropolitan lives, mellowed, rested, and refreshed. Their faith renewed in the perpetual youth of Nature, and in the bounty of her gifts to man, they admit to themselves, perhaps openly, perhaps only tacitly, that they have been strangely and wonderfully transformed by the peaceful fields and hillsides of the Valley of the Moon.

At the height of Agoston Haraszthy's career in California viticulture he built an impressive Pompeian-type home northeast of Sonoma (opposite page) on his Buena Vista ranch. Formal gardens were enclosed by an ornamental fence. For a long time it was a show place. Today only remnants of its sturdy foundations remain.







September sunlight filters through autumn-hued trees at the edge of the wooded Sonoma Plaza. This is a center if interest to thousands of visitors who annually find relaxation at the Vintage Festival in the Valley of the Moon.



BRIAN MCGINTY

THE AUTHOR

The rich heritage of California and the Valley of the Moon have found an expressive voice in Brian McGinty. Great-great grandson of two of the Sonoma Valley's early vineyardist pioneers, the Hungarian Colonel Agoston Haraszthy, "Father of California Viticulture," and the Spanish General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, founder of Sonoma and early-day Comandante General of California, Mr. McGinty has shown a keen interest in the early development of his native state and the American West, through articles published in WESTWAYS, GAME AND GOSSIP, *and the Historical Society of Southern California* QUARTERLY. *Born in Santa Barbara, he is a graduate of the University of California and the University's School of Law in Berkeley.*

CAPTAIN ALLAN HANCOCK, a son of Forty-Niners, is shown at right, addressing the Vintage Festival throng of 1957 at Sonoma Mission, after which he unveiled the bronze plaque at Buena Vista, honoring his maternal grandfather, Count Agoston Haraszthy.

"Since the dawn of civilization," he said, "the grape has been the symbol of the better life! Through your own industry and the fine community spirit you have developed here, you have done much to glorify the grape. Your products are known everywhere. As a boy I remember playing with my cousins around Buena Vista Vineyards. It was a pleasant place then. It is an incredible place now!"

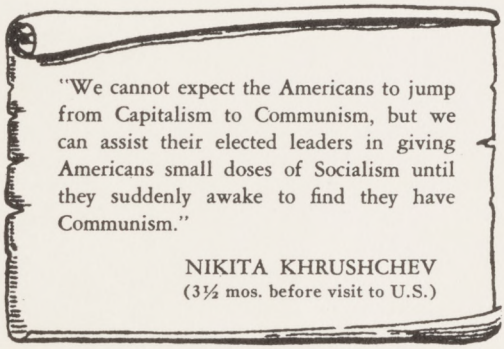
Colonel Haraszthy was a Hungarian Count who emigrated to Wisconsin and after founding Sauk City led a covered wagon train to San Diego. He had four sons, Gaza, Attila, Arpad and Bela, and two daughters, Ida and Otelia. It was Attila who married Natalia Vallejo, a daughter of Gen. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo. One of their sons, Agoston, fathered Natalia Haraszthy who wed Donald McGinty. Their son, Brian McGinty, is the author of this booklet.

Ida Haraszthy married Major Henry Hancock of Bath, N.H., a Harvard lawyer and engineer who sailed around Cape Horn in 1849. Colonel Haraszthy and Maj. Hancock served together in the first California legislature. Major Hancock settled many land titles in Southern California, made the second survey of Los Angeles and purchased Rancho La Brea in 1860. This early Mexican grant was developed by his son, Allan Hancock, of Los Angeles and Santa Maria.



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Today's challenge to Americans —



"We cannot expect the Americans to jump from Capitalism to Communism, but we can assist their elected leaders in giving Americans small doses of Socialism until they suddenly awake to find they have Communism."

NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV
(3½ mos. before visit to U.S.)

2021.3.33